



Ulster-Scots Research

Dan Poffenberger, AG®

Senior British and Irish Research Specialist
Family History Library
poffenbergerds@familysearch.org

This handout introduces you to Ulster-Scots research, including how they came to be. There is also some basic research strategy and a list of key resources for the reader to pursue. This information is less than the proverbial “dipping of the foot in the pool” but more a “big toe.”

Introduction

The Nine Years' War (1593-1603) set the stage for the story of the Scottish in the Province of Ulster. In short, the war was fought between the British Army and a number of Gaelic lordships led by Hugh O'Neill of the O'Neills of Tyrone and Rory O'Donnell of Tyrconnell. The Treaty of Mellifont in 1603 ceded control of Ulster to the English. Conflict continued resulting in the 'Flight of the Earls' wherein Gaelic leaders attempt flee Ulster in 1607.

Following the 'Flight', the British government initiated a plantation scheme wherein land confiscated from Irish lords was distributed to English and Scottish “undertakers” (not morticians), loyal Irish and Trinity College, and the Church of Ireland. Starting in 1610, six counties were part of the plantation: Armagh, Cavan, Londonderry (previous called Coleraine), Donegal, Fermanagh and Tyrone. Londonderry was granted to livery companies from London, otherwise distribution of land required the ‘planting’ of ten families for every 1,000 acres.

You may note that the Ulster counties of Antrim, Down and Monaghan weren't part of the government plantation scheme and owned by Irish. Rather, private plantations resulted in the migration of English and Scottish settlers. Randall MacDonnell, Earl of Antrim in 1620, invited lowland Scots to settle on his land encouraging Protestants on to Catholic owned lands, along with the Scottish came Presbyterian ministers. The Irish Catholic Church was able to operate somewhat freely, there were increasing numbers of Presbyterians and the Church of Ireland with the backing of the British government, was the religion of those in power.

From the time of the Charles II, King of England in 1660, Catholics and Presbyterians suffered through what is known as the Penal Period in Ireland. This lasted until the 1780's when laws against them began to be relaxed. Presbyterians and other minority Protestant religions such as Quakers and Methodists, finding Ulster to be an increasingly difficult place to practice their religion, began immigrating to North America. Migration continued in waves due to crop failure, drought and famine through the 1700's. The primary places they immigrated to were New England, Pennsylvania and later South Carolina. Estimates are that anywhere from 100,000 to 250,000 left and went to America. These became the Ulster-Scots, aka Scots-Irish or Scotch-Irish.

Two “Must-Have” Handbooks

For those serious about attempting to solve the research problem of an Ulster-Scots ancestor, two excellent research books have been published in the past two years. They are:

American Scots-Irish Research: Strategies and Sources in the Quest for Ulster-Scots Origins by Dwight A. Radford (Orting, Washington: Family Roots Pub. Co., 2020 FHL# 973 D27rd)

Researching Scots-Irish Ancestors: The essential genealogical guide to early modern Ulster, 1600-1800, 2nd ed. by William J. Roulston (Belfast, Ireland: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2018 FHL# 941.6 D27r 2018).

Both are wonderful for reasons not exclusive to each other. Dwight Radford has been a professional genealogist using the Family History Library in Salt Lake City for many years and brings an American perspective to solving Scots-Irish research problems. William J. Roulston has been an officer and member of the Ulster Historical Foundation based in Belfast for many years and brings an Irish perspective. Both deserve credit for the strategies and sources that follow.

Strategy

Solving Ulster-Scots research problems are difficult. Rarely does one document indicate where in Ireland the immigrant came from. The solution will likely come from a combination of sources, relating to a number of people, from various connected families, over multiple generations. If you're looking for a simple, easy solution, you may want to work on another pedigree problem.

A thorough search in American sources is required. It is often difficult just figuring out who the immigrant is. Adding to the possible confusion is that many Scottish came directly from Scotland so is your ancestor Scots-Irish or merely Scottish? Or are they Scots-Irish who went to Scotland before coming to America? Assuming they are Scots-Irish from Ireland, the temptation is to jump to Irish sources. Keep in mind the earliest Presbyterian registers date to the 1690's, and the average start date is 1819. Considering there were hundreds of thousands of Presbyterians in Ulster, baptism and marriage records for your ancestor in Ireland likely don't exist.

Thus your research process should be exhaustive in the sources searched and in the analysis of the information found so that a sound genealogical conclusion can be reached. These following sources should be searched for your ancestor's "FAN Club" (Friends, Associates, Neighbors). It's invaluable to know the maiden name of the wife of your immigrant ancestor, then research her people. Group, congregational and chain migration were often part of the immigration process. This is part of the "FAN Club" noted above. Initial sources will be in American records. Each source below could have numerous classes to help you understand them. Below is hopefully enough to encourage you to understand their importance and to learn more.

Key American Sources

For detailed understanding of how to use the following records as part of a sound research strategy, see Dwight Radford's book noted above. It not only covers the sources but contains excellent bibliographic references to assist you.

U.S Census Records and Tax Lists – The 1850 Census is the first to record birthplaces. There are many born in Ireland in the 1780's and 1790's listed. Pay attention to those people living in the communities of your Scots-Irish ancestors. The earlier censuses and tax lists, when not in alphabetical order are critical to putting together "neighborhoods." These can then be used to identify connect families and friends with similar origins. They could also lead to church records, a minister, and possible connections in Ulster.

U.S. Church Records – U.S. church records in the 1700's can be daunting since many churches had traveling or circuit ministers keeping their own records. Remember that not all

Ulster-Scots are Presbyterian. Some are Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Moravian, Quakers and more. Also, there are different types of Presbyterians such as Associate, Reformed or Cumberland Presbyterians. Note that records for those living in frontier areas rarely have church records documenting them until at least the Second Great Awakening 1790-1820's. More established areas, such as New England and the influx of Scots-Irish starting in 1718 may be a little easier to find. Identify other members of the "FAN Club" and ministers are key.

Land Records – Land records are a key piece in solving these research problems. They document when and where someone is living. They often identify neighbors and family, origins in other parts of the county, state or country and even, perhaps, connections in Ireland. Searching the records is time consuming but critical. Many of those microfilmed by FamilySearch have been digitized and can be searched online.

Lineage Societies – To belong to a lineage society one must document a relationship to a particular ancestor. A few relevant lineage societies are the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Society of Cincinnati, General Society of the War of 1812, General Society Sons of the Revolution, Scotch-Irish Society of the United States of America, and National Society of the Colonial Dames of America. There are many more. Society members and their ancestors may provide clues regarding your Scots-Irish ancestor so, again, extend the search to the "FAN Club".

Military Records – Many Ulster-Scots were in the Colonial, Revolutionary and War of 1812 armies. A variety of records with pension records being foremost among them. Militias and units were often formed among people from the same areas. Once an understanding of colonial military records is gained, websites like Ancestry, FamilySearch and Fold3 are good places to find records.

Pre-1820 Passenger Lists – On the American side of things, systematic lists didn't start until 1820. However, occasional lists were made. Many compilations have been made of inferred immigrants to specific areas. These, along with the *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index* are where to start. Some volumes of the latter are digitized at Ancestry.com.

Vital/Town Records – Towns in New England kept vital and town records. Many have been published to 1850. They give great insights into the population of a town, along with town and county histories. Many are digitized on Ancestry and FamilySearch. The website for the New England Historic Genealogy Society, www.americanancestors.com, is a great resource for these records. They also have histories and genealogies. Pennsylvania didn't keep systematic vital records until much later and other states kept marriage records at a county level. Access to tombstone records has increased with websites BillionGraves and FindAGrave. Compared to other ethnicities, the Scots and Irish were more likely to indicate at least a county of origin in the old world.

Key Irish Sources

Census Substitutes and Name Lists – Local names lists were kept for a variety of reasons by the government, churches, estates and businesses. A thorough search for records in your locality will uncover them. The NationalArchives.ie, National Library of Ireland (NLI.ie), the PRONI website, Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org and FindMyPast.com have a wide variety of name lists. These include:

- Tithe Applotment Books, 1823-1838, www.nationalarchives.ie and other places.
- Valuation Office House, Field, Tenure & Quarto Books, 1824–1856, www.nationalarchives.ie and other places.

- Diocesan & Prerogative Marriage License Bonds Indexes, 1623–1866, www.nationalarchives.ie and other places.
- Ireland, Diocesan and Prerogative Wills & Administrations Indexes, 1595-1858, www.familysearch.org. Though most wills pre-1858 were destroyed in the Four Courts fire, the index indicates a place and time for a possible ancestor. Many wills were abstracted before they were destroyed as well. The FamilySearch Wiki article titled "Ireland Probate Records" is a good place to start.
- Irish Flax Growers List, 1796 (60,000 names, two thirds in Ulster), <https://www.failteromhat.com/flax1796.php>.
- The Religious Census of 1766. Church of Ireland ministers were to prepare lists of the names of all householders in their respective parishes. What survives is often just totals for each parish. However, some did list the householders with the term Protestant often referring to Church of Ireland and Dissenters to Presbyterians. The originals were destroyed in 1922. It is indexed and the names can be found using the "Name" search in PRONI's catalog.
- Census of Protestant Householders, 1740, contains nearly 16,000 names and is especially good for Co. Londonderry and the top half of Co. Antrim. The originals were destroyed in 1922 but transcripts were made. It is indexed and the names can be found using the "Name" search in PRONI's catalog.
- The Rebellion of 1641 resulted in 8,000 depositions in which Protestant men and women testified of their experiences. Thousands are named. These are indexed, digitized and fully searchable at <https://1641.tcd.ie/>.

Roulston's book above has an amazing number of lists. The John Grenham website, www.johngrenham.com, also lists several under "Browse" then "County-by-county listings" then select the county of interest.

Church Records – Presbyterian records were not destroyed in the 1922 fire. They simply weren't well kept. The earliest surviving register dates to 1674 but most don't exist until the 1820's after more than 100,000 people had left for the Americas. The data is basic to the event, and few burial records were kept. For those, check the local Church of Ireland burial grounds for Presbyterian burials. Also, there were various forms of Presbyterians as well as other Protestant religions. Like with other sources, it is an opportunity to identify families living in a particular area. Be careful to not ignore the fact that records likely don't exist so just because a possible baptism or marriage record exists elsewhere, it doesn't mean it's ancestral. The best place to start to determine what exists is the PRONI Guide to Church Records: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/proni-guide-church-records>. The Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland (www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com) has congregational histories and records. Click on "Collections" to begin your search. Lastly, the Ulster Historical Foundation has a website (www.ancestryireland.com) with a few free records and about 1.8 million pay-per-records, including tombstone inscriptions.

Fasti for the Presbyterian Church – An American Presbyterian may have trained and begun his ministry in Ireland. The Irish list can indicate immigration to America. Members of the congregation often followed the minister. A FamilySearch Catalog search for keywords "Fasti" and "Irish" will produce a list of volumes held by the Family History Library.

Registry of Deeds – Most Ulster-Scots leased their land from a landholder. These leases were often for a term of "lives" or for the life of the person named in the lease. An agreement for three lives, possibly three generations, was common. Beginning in 1708, land transactions in Ireland had to be registered with the Registry of Deeds. These deeds differ somewhat from the typical

grantee/grantor sort found in American land records. They may contain sales, marriage settlements and wills. Hundreds of thousands are named. The records microfilmed by FamilySearch have been digitized but are not fully indexed. To learn more, go to the FamilySearch Wiki, search for "Ireland Land and Property." You'll find out more about the Registry of Deeds below the list of links.

Passenger Lists – Ireland was one country and part of the British empire until 1922. Keeping outbound passenger lists was not required until 1890. A few local lists of assisted and congregational immigrants to America exist. Brian Mitchell's article "Irish Emigrant Passenger Lists." in the bibliography below is a place to start.

Final Considerations

Additional, specific, and detailed research strategies on Using Ulster Records, Latter-day Saint ancestors, Southeastern Native American connections, and United Empire Loyalists are also included in Dwight Radford's book so pay special attention to those chapters as they apply.

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